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WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS

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CHARLES F. DOLE D. D.

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BY

CHARLES F. DOLE, D.D.

"I search after truth, by which man never yet was harmed."
MARCUS AURELIUS, VI, 21

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Dedication

TO ALL LOVERS OF TRUTH, AND TO THOSE ALSO WHO CHERISH SENTIMENT, IN THE FAITH THAT TRUTH AND SENTIMENT GO TOGETHER ; THAT NO VITAL SENTIMENT CAN BE HURT BY THE TEMPORARY READJUSTMENT AND EXTENSION OF THE TRELLIS UPON WHICH IT HAS CLIMBED.

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PREFACE

I am aware that, while some readers will approve what I say in this book, others even among those who will agree in its conclusions, may deprecate my treatment of the life of Jesus. All sorts of familiar traditions tend subtly to prevent men who have been reared in the Christian faith from saying frankly what they think about its founder, and often forbid them to ask seriously what they do think. Many good people fear that the plain truth, if faced or uttered, may hurt the cause of religion, if not for themselves at least for others.

My intent in this little book is altogether positive, ethical and constructive. I have a firm faith that the search for the truth, if only modest and reverent, is always a wholesome and necessary means of moral and spiritual development. I have the same faith in the fearless utterance of the truth. The very effort to tell the truth and report exactly what we find is

good for us. Let each lover of the truth do this and we open our minds to the light. There can be no subject too sacred to throw all the light possible upon it. Who can imagine the actual Jesus as wishing anyone to evade the question: What think ye of Christ?

A wonderful process of the re-examination of all the evidences of religion has been going on for more than a century. A mass of cumbersome and cruel dogmas has been swept away. The churches that still profess to hold them no longer take them seriously. The Bible has been reclaimed from a book of mystery to its natural place in the literature of the world. It is the story of the growth of man's moral and religious life. Its noble teachings were never so clear as now when we see the whole work in its real perspective. The lasting foundations of religion, as laid in the nature of man, and built upon by the noble lives and deeds of each new generation, were never so conspicuous as now. With every fresh utterance of the men who give us their innermost thought about religion, there has come in spite of the fears of the timid, a new pressure to rest back upon the

enduring foundations out of which the good life forever springs into being. Call this, if you like, an age of question and doubt. It is also an age of faith;—faith in truth, faith in progress, faith in God and a good universe, growing faith in the humanity of every race and color.

The new judgment of the Bible inevitably touches the person of Jesus. We cannot continue lightly to take for granted certain easy assumptions about him. Whereas the world has worshiped him as a God for many centuries, the whole modern tendency is to think of him as a man. This idea was in the ancient creeds, but it lay dormant in them. The deity of Jesus, not his humanity, took pretty nearly the whole emphasis. Now that all allow that Jesus was a real man, it is high time to try to find out what it is to be a man. To be a man is to suffer limitations; it is not to know everything, but often to be misinformed; it is to share in the ideas of one's own time and people; it is to be subject to weariness and to be liable to passions; it is to vary in one's moods, not to see one's ideals at all times with equal

clearness, not to love even one's own friends always with equal ardor; it is to err at least in judgment if not in purpose; it is indeed to fall short of that constancy and activity of goodness which we ascribe only to the infinite Good Will. The fact is, the psychology of human nature makes it hardly possible to conceive a real man who, however much he partakes of the divine nature, may maintain at all times and towards all persons the perfectness of God. There is every reason therefore why we should take Jesus in earnest when he makes the famous reply to the man who called him "Good Master:"—"There is none good but one, that is, God."

Few ever ask the question upon what grounds we continue to call Jesus the sinless or absolute man. I wish to make a study of the evidence for this idea. What if it appears to be an item of dogma, and not a truth of biography?

A word here is necessary, as to what we mean by sinlessness. If we deny the title of sinlessness to any man, we mean simply, that he is a man, a growing creature, climbing still

towards an infinite ideal which he has not reached. We do not, however, like the medieval theologians, call a man a "sinner," because he is not perfect like God. We do not call Jesus a sinner, when we cease to call him sinless. We all know people with whom we find no fault, "without guile," true-hearted, high-minded. There may be no one who possesses absolute health, but there are those who are generally well and never ill. So there are always men and women of natural integrity, like the splendid character of Job in the story. There is no question but that Jesus belonged to this class.

We shall find that our study requires us to separate two words which have grown together, namely, Jesus and Christ. They represent different ideas. The one, beginning with a local and national meaning, namely, the Jewish Messiah, Prince, or Savior, has developed, till it has really come to be for millions of people another and more intimate name for God. It is the name of the God of Humanity. If this word "Christ" were once freed of all supernatural or dogmatic suggestion, it is conceivable that the

people of all religions might come to use it to express their highest and fullest conception of the Infinite Goodness. It is evident, however, that when the word Christ has developed so as to hold the total content that is associated with the older word "God," we mean by it something different from the prophet of Galilee. This Christ, or God, was doubtless in Jesus, as he is in all true men. This God is present in human life and history, but the man Jesus is not also present, in any other sense than Paul or Isaiah is. So much for the development of the word "Christ."

Meanwhile the first movement of thought about the man Jesus was to lift him also into the rank of infinite beings. The words "Jesus and Christ" came to be used interchangeably and to be molded together, till at last Jesus was called the absolute God, who should "come to judge the world!" The modern thought of the world has already almost rescued Jesus' humanity. We are assured that he was a real man, in spite of the natural flutter of timid souls. Nothing but good has come of this process of the rehabilitation of the actual Jesus.

The thought of the world, however, cannot stand still midway in a process. The process must go on. The development is inevitable. We cannot honestly believe Jesus to be a man, and still hold him between heaven and earth, where no other man ever was. He was raised to be more than man for a dogmatic purpose; namely, so as to die for men's sins. When that purpose fails, no speculative reason remains to hold Jesus above the ranks of the great and illustrious who have led the march of mankind. At any rate, there is nothing to make us fear to be free to ask just what kind of human life the real man Jesus lived. There is nothing to give more than a temporary shock to anyone's sentiment in case we find that Jesus' humanity was precisely like our own. Do we not love our friends even when on occasion we deprecate their words or actions? What man, however high his intent, is so infallible as never to err?

The movement of thought about Jesus is just like the similar process touching the Bible. They used to tell us of the divineness and inerrancy of every word of the Scriptures: then

we discovered that there were mistakes in the Bible, and we were presently assured that these mistakes never affected the teaching of religion. Then we passed on to be told, that while the Old Testament was more or less doubtful in its teachings, the New Testament remained, or at the last resort, the very words of Jesus were final authority. Now at last we are taking our full liberty with the whole Bible. We treat it as the library of a notable people. We recognize the vast differences of level in it; we read along with it other inspired books and poems, enjoy all of them, and give each the weight that belongs to it. We are thus not poorer but richer in our spiritual assets.

So we may expect to find with the life of Jesus. He is not a God, but a man. What then if he appear to be truly a man? What if we use our minds and our consciences, touching his words and conduct, as we do with all other men? What if we differ from him in thought and judgment, as we differ from others? What if we find differences of level in his teachings, as we have already found in the Bible generally, and as we find in other great

teachers? What if we are free, while taking him as a great helper towards the good life, to discover other noble friends to whom we give our hearts also. Is love or admiration any the less because it goes out like the light in every direction?

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WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS

I

THE PROBLEM

There is one person who doubtless occupies the most commanding position in human history. From the supposed date of his birth the most progressive and civilized nations measure time. Hundreds of millions of people bow at his name. Vast systems of religion trace back to him as their founder. Grand temples in every quarter of the earth hold him in memory and keep festivals for his sake. Libraries of books have been poured out and are still poured out from the scholarly and literary workshops of the world, making this one man's words the central point of their discussion. Along with men's traffic in wheat or in wine, the Bibles go also, telling to new readers the story of Jesus. All this is very wonderful.

What sort of man was Jesus? We mean the actual, historic person. Leave aside, at least for the time, the answer of the creeds to the question, "Who Jesus was." The creeds all confess that he made an impression as a man. We wish to get some idea what this human impression was. Is it possible, for example, to compose a biography of Jesus, or at least a sketch of his life?

From any point of view our problem must be extremely difficult. It is no slight task indeed to obtain a really clear and lifelike, not to say accurate, description of a man of our own stock and language, and as near our own time as Channing and Washington, only a hundred years ago or less. But in Jesus' case we have to make our way back nearly twenty centuries. We peer dimly through hundreds of years where books, or rather manuscripts, were extremely rare, and careful scholarship as we know the term was rarer still; we reach back to an age of superstition and credulity; we come at last upon a few bits of writing which constitute almost the sole authority of our knowledge for the beginnings of Christianity: I

mean the New Testament books, the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles. Outside of these writings we know nothing authentic about Jesus. Moreover most of the New Testament does not profess to give us any information about him. Paul obviously had only the slightest acquaintance with his teachings, which he hardly more than quotes once, or of his historic life which he seems to slight in favor of a somewhat mystical theory of his personality. We are shut up to the four Gospels, three of them in large part merely parallel with one another, and the fourth, a psychological problem at the best to every one who studies it carefully.

As to the Fourth Gospel, candor compels the admission that all its material, whether of story or teaching, has passed through the alembic of a mind so subtle, so mystic, so individualistic, that you can never distinguish the substance of his own contribution of thought and sentiment from the original matter with which he deals. His literary style, his somewhat philosophical interests, his allusions, as for example, to the Jews, as though they were a foreign people, his extraordinary discrepancies from the synoptic

Gospels, make it wellnigh incredible that the work comes from an actual disciple of Jesus, least of all, a Galilean fisherman. The best that any one can claim is, what Matthew Arnold suggested, that the author had some relation to John, or had certain traditions from him. At the best, we are not shown in this Gospel a real and tangible man. It is not veritable flesh and blood; it is an ideal character, about no single incident of whose career, and no distinct paragraph of whose doctrine can you be certain that you rest upon the bed-rock of fact. It is precisely like certain early paintings of Jesus in which the artist had obviously put his own ideal on the canvas. The picture is interesting, but it is not the actual Jesus whom we seek. At any rate no one can ever be in the least confident that the treatise makes us better acquainted with the actual Jesus, while all the presumption is against such confidence.

Setting the Fourth Gospel aside, as we must if we ask for reality, we confessedly have no narrative from the pen of an eye witness or acquaintance of Jesus. All the four Gospels

indeed are anonymous. The most conservative student cannot throw one of them, in its present shape, back to within a generation of the time of Jesus' death. There is nothing to show that, growing slowly out of traditions and reminiscences more or less accurate, and possible early bits of memories of Jesus' sayings, the Gospels were not a hundred years in shaping themselves as we now have them. It is most unlikely that they took the form of the Greek language in Palestine, but rather that they developed far away from where Jesus lived, in order to meet the demands of foreign communities. This was an age when the most extraordinary happenings were looked for and eagerly believed. Moreover, the earliest Christian books had their growth beyond the range of any hostile criticism. We have only to mention the name of Christian Science, not to say Persian Babism, to remind ourselves how all sorts of wonderful stories, once easily started and springing out of the soil, tend to move on and get accretions in an atmosphere that craves material on which to nourish its faith.

Bearing these considerations in mind, what matter of solid knowledge about Jesus do we find in our Synoptic Gospels? A few pages at the most—the amount of a little pamphlet—out of which all the ponderous biographies have been elaborated, without the addition of practically a single incident or important new teaching.[1] A considerable part of the mate-

[1] There are 2,899 verses in the three Gospels. Practically the whole substance of Mark with its 678 verses is incorporated bodily in one or both of the other evangelists. Except for the birth stories and the expansion of the resurrection story there is little new material touching Jesus' life in Matthew or Luke that is not already contained in Mark. We gain in the two larger Gospels, however, a considerable expansion of his teachings, especially in the matter of "the Sermon on the Mount," and the parables. More than a fourth of Mark, or about 180 verses, consists of the miracles or wonder-stories. More than another fourth, or about 200 verses, consists of Jesus' teachings. Only about 160 verses, or less than a fourth, give us the story of Jesus, aside from the teachings and wonder-stories. Of this portion one-half is the story of his trial and death. A certain remainder of the Gospel, such as the narrative of John the Baptist, refers to other subjects besides the story or teachings of Jesus. The amount of strictly biographical material in the other Gospels is not much greater than in Mark,—perhaps 200 verses in Matthew, more than half of which is the story of the trial and death, and 180 verses in Luke with 80 verses about the last days. Outside of the last days of Jesus' life, we cannot claim to have altogether in all the evangelists the amount of more than about two chapters of fifty verses each of strictly biographical material, besides perhaps seven chapters of wonder-stories, and eight or nine chapters of teachings.

rial consist in wonder-stories or miracles. The story of the final days of Jesus' life, concluding with his trial and death, makes a generous percentage of the whole narrative. The connection of events is slight: we can never know how long Jesus spent in public life,—barely more than a year, if we only consult the Synoptic Gospels. Except for the bit of story from Luke about his visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve, we know nothing except his parentage from Joseph and Mary, till he suddenly appears, a mature man, from a possible period of sojourn in the desert, waiting among the crowd who come to the baptism of John at the Jordan. Only a very few personal incidents, here and there a glimpse as of one passing us in the street, serve to reveal the real man. How we strain our eyes to see what he looks like, to catch the tone of his voice, to get for one long moment the clear impress of his personality. Who can honestly say that he ever feels acquainted with Jesus? What modern admirer of his would really leave his business and accompany Jesus in his wanderings?

Moreover, thanks to an army of scholars

and critics, dissecting every verse in the New Testament, we have arrived at such a point of uncertainty as to the relative value of different elements in the Synoptic Gospels, that every one practically may take what he likes, both of the narrative and teaching, and reject as unauthentic or improbable whatever seems to him incongruous or unworthy. Does a modern man shy at the birth stories in Matthew and Luke? There is every reason to believe that they never formed a part of the earlier tradition about Jesus; in fact they confuse and defeat one another. Does any one doubt the story of the resurrection of Jesus' body? All the best scholars are with him in the doubt; the different stories discredit each other. Does one like to believe that Jesus cursed the figtree, or sent a horde of demons to destroy the Gadarene peasants' swine?[2] No one needs to believe anything that he may deem an accretion upon the Gospels. Does any one question whether Jesus prophesied the speedy end of the world in the famous and numerous verses concerning the Second Com-

[2] Mark v. 1, etc.

ing of the Son of Man?[3] Then, this whole group of teachings may be modified to any extent or quite swept away! Does any one, on the other hand, find the beatitudes scattered about in the Old Testament, and the Golden Rule already enunciated there? Very well! There are two quite different versions of the beatitudes in any case, with much unlikelihood that Jesus himself performed the feat of genius in grouping them together, as we now find them, in Matthew.[4]

How many clearly authentic utterances have we from Jesus? What can we rest upon? What exactly did he do? What did he say of himself and his mission? What commandments did he lay down, or what ordinances did he establish? What new ideas if any did he contribute? The answers to all these questions must be found if at all, in the study of a few pages of the Synoptic Gospels. No one is sure, or can possibly be sure, of these answers. The light is too dim in that remote corner of the Roman Empire of the First Century where

[3] E. g. Matt. xxiv.

[4] Compare Matt. v.–viii. with Luke vi.

we are at work deciphering, as it were, a series of palimpsests.

It might be said, changing our figure, that we find a very remarkable torso or at least the fragments of a statue. Amiel has said something of this sort about the remains from which we have to construct the life of Jesus. This is surely all that any one can say. But a torso is definite and complete as far as it goes; fragments and pieces are firm in your hands; you can match them together; you can reconstruct the torso. The fragments in our case crumble; they are mixed with other fragments; if they combine, they never form one and the same combination. You have not one Jesus, but two or more, each with different elements, more or less, and no one into which it is possible to harmonize all the material even of our bit of a pamphlet made up from the three short Synoptic Gospels.

I am merely stating facts to illustrate the enormous difficulty of the proposition, so often glibly quoted,—"Back to Jesus." There is no evidence that those who repeat this phrase ever have tried to find the actual Jesus. What they

say of him, their descriptions and paintings and panegyrics, almost never appear like the genuine work of even tolerable copyists. There are second-hand artists who have at least seen original work. But the conventional descriptions of Jesus not only vary; they never seem to have been near an original. The more complete and entertaining they are, the nearer they come to being pure creations of the author's mind. They are German, or Italian, or English, or American pictures, and generally somewhat modern. They are not Hebrew, whereas Jesus was a Jew of twenty centuries ago.

We are bound to say these things frankly, if we say anything. It is not my part, even if I were able, to add another fancy picture to the gallery of the Lives of Jesus. I can only report what I find. I find and present a problem. I do not think it can ever be solved. But it suggests certain important and practical considerations.

II

THE REAL MAN IN TWO ASPECTS

The fault with the conventional method of approach to the study of Jesus consists in the effort, by a sheer *tour de force,* to make the portrait of a harmonious, consistent and ideal character, and to establish a well-rounded and absolute system of doctrine. This is what men have expected, and insisted upon discovering. The bondage of the old-world thought of Jesus, as a supernatural being, has prevailed even over the minds of most modern scholars. If here and there a student has ventured to tell the straight story of what he really found in the Gospels, people have lifted up their hands in protest. But granting to Jesus real humanity, and not a mere docetic appearance of a man, why should we not expect to find in him,—a true child of his age, a veritable "son of man,"—at least the usual characteristics of humanity?

I am constrained to believe that we have, first in the narrative, and then next in the teachings ascribed to Jesus, not one perfected person, but dissimilar aspects or sides of a person himself in the process of natural development; not one consistent and perfect scheme of doctrine, as if revealed from heaven, but diverse forms of thought.

Let us gather the bits of the story, such as make the basis for the idea of the perfect and sinless Christ. You will be surprised how few these passages are and how far short they fall of making such a picture. I mean the kind of passages that give you a lifelike touch of the man. For example, the picture of Jesus sitting weary at the well, with his free and democratic willingness to talk with the woman of Samaria,[1] is the kind of material that we should like to feel certain about. So is the little story about the woman taken in adultery, inserted as an addition to the Fourth Gospel.[2] We hope that this is a valid piece of tradition. It gives us the great and lovable Jesus. The

[1] John iv. 6, etc.
[2] John viii. 1, etc.

story of the home in Bethany and Jesus' friends there suggests a glimpse of reality. The verse "Jesus wept" in the story of Lazarus might be adduced, if it were not hopelessly complicated with the difficulties of a wonder story. Why should Jesus weep if he knew that he carried the victorious power to release his friend from death? Why on the other hand should he have purposely stayed away, as no friendly physician does, needless hours after he was summoned to his friend's house?[3] One might also like to add from the same Gospel the relation of Jesus to the beloved disciple who lay on his breast at the supper. This may present an actual scene. If so, it is what we are looking for. Shall we add the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet?[4] I confess this seems to me artificial and, if true, symbolic. We rather shrink from acts done for the sake of example. In real life there is no need of doing such acts. This story indeed falls in with the mystical theory of the unknown author. Again, we should like to be

[3] John xi.
[4] John xiii. 4.

sure of the incident where Jesus on the cross commends his mother to his favorite disciple,[5] all the more that we cannot from any point of view enjoy the manner of Jesus to his mother, as related in a familiar passage in the synoptists.[6] Aside from these few and scattered passages, we can hardly find any biographical material in the Fourth Gospel, even granting its historicity, which acquaints us with the great, noble, lovable Jesus.

On the other hand, the general portraiture of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel hardly impresses us as winning or lovable. We are constantly disturbed by the language of egotism and self-assertion continuously put into Jesus' mouth in accordance with the author's evident conception of a mystical and Messianic personage, not a veritable man. The constant use of the word "I" almost spoils the Gospel for profitable Scripture reading to a modern congregation. Moreover, John's Jesus repeatedly assails, provokes and castigates the leaders of

[5] John xxv. 28–31.

[6] Matt. xii, 47; Mark iii, 31; Luke viii, 19; see also John ii. 4.

his people.[7] All this portraiture, judged by our highest standards of conduct, is unworthy of the best type of man, not to say a good God. We willingly put the Fourth Gospel aside, content to believe that its writer never knew Jesus and accordingly misrepresents him. It should be added that our ethical difficulty would be still greater if it could be demonstrated that Jesus' disciple John was the actual author. For we should then be obliged to take seriously all the harsh and even inhumane elements in the Gospel.[8]

Turn now to the Synoptic Gospels and mass

[7] See for example the passage John viii. 33–59.

[8] The Fourth Gospel gives over 200 verses of narrative concerning Jesus, besides 150 verses which relate a few selected miracles. How little of this material goes to exhibit a living man has been shown already. Even the miracles are performed for the purpose of demonstration (see John xi. 4, 15). Of the considerable amount of teachings, about 300 verses or six long chapters in all, we may gather perhaps fifty verses as containing precious or universal value. The best of this is exceedingly similar to the best material, namely, the doctrine of love, in the First Epistle of John. Of the remaining sayings, fifty verses or more, are, from an ethical point of view, unsuitable for general use, or even repugnant to the moral sense. Thus, "Have not I chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil" is full of difficulty to the modern mind (John vi. 70, see also ix. 39); and in xvii. 9, the words: "I pray not for the world." Why not, from one who loved all men?

together what we may find. We note first Jesus' sturdy democracy. He eats and drinks at publicans' houses. What radical freedom of convention this was! It was as if we had a story of Channing or Theodore Parker, as seen arm in arm with a liquor dealer. Jesus' associates for the most part are humble persons of the social class from which he himself sprang. We read of his constant compassion and spirit of mercy, especially as shown to the poor in works of healing.

These wonders of healing make up so large a portion of the whole narrative, as to tend to obscure the portrait of the real Jesus. To the student of psychology they fall into line with similar wonder-stories which appear through human history from the tales about Elijah and Elisha to the miracles at Lourdes, or the experiences related in a Christian Science Temple. You will hardly be able to doubt that in Jesus' case these numerous stories must have grown out of a reputed power, analogous to what we believe exists in certain men and women to-day, to soothe or quiet, or again to rouse nervous and sick people and to help them

to stand upon their feet. However we may handle the wonder-stories, they seem to represent one striking characteristic in Jesus, namely, his humanity and his sympathy. Here is a warm heart towards those who suffer. I hardly know, however, why we need to be surprised in finding this character in Jesus. We all know people in whom likewise benevolence is a passion. There are physicians who are daily giving their lives, without thought of praise, for the healing of people. They love, as Jesus did, to "go about doing good." This is a quite natural form of human activity.

The story about Jesus and the little children[9] is one of the conspicuous bits of personal narrative. All the world loves that picture. We love it because we all love children, just as Jesus did. It is a natural story. We like also the little human touch in Mark x. 21, where Jesus falls in love with the rich young man who comes to him with questions.

Furthermore, we get bare glimpses of Jesus in the scene with the woman who brings oint-

[9] Mark x. 13.

ment at Simon's house;[10] in his visits to Mary and Martha;[11] in the story of Zacchæus;[12] of the widow's mite,[13] and of his lamentation over Jerusalem.[14] Such passages give an idea of a quite independent and original character, direct and outspoken in his judgments, intense in his feelings, thoroughly human, who readily commanded attention and regard.

We observe in passing that at the time when the Gospels received their present form, the dogmatic conception of Jesus as a supernatural personage has evidently made its impress on the story. It is already the story, not so much of a real man as of a wonder-worker and a Messiah. This trend of thought dominates the Gospels and makes it very difficult to find the real man whom we are seeking to discover.

I have purposely put aside the story of the temptation. For it reads like a series of dreams; it belongs to an unreal world; it certainly suggests no such actual temptation as

[10] Luke vii. 44.
[11] Luke x. 38.
[12] Luke xix.
[13] Luke xxi. 1, etc.
[14] Matthew xxiii. 37, etc.

come to flesh and blood men outside of monasteries. It is also complicated with the doctrine of devils. So far as it presents the fact of resistance to real and human temptation, there is nothing specially striking about it. The wonder is that any of the three items related could have constituted temptation to a sane intelligence.[15]

There remain the longer stories of Jesus' trial and death. There is an atmosphere of traditional mystery about this series of events. The famous saying is that "Socrates died like a philosopher but Jesus like a God." There is here no such valid distinction. If Jesus had some mystic consciousness of the outcome of his death, he might well have been buoyed up as if angels were about him. If the shadows, however, gathered over him as over others in the last hour, then we can only say, what we also say of countless deaths of heroes and martyrs, that he met his death

[15] Grant, however, that by the orthodox theory Jesus was a man completely possessed at all times with the Logos, or the "Eternal Christ," he was thereby lifted above the level of temptation, and equally (it would seem) above the possibility of growth. But this assumption produces an unreal man.

sturdily as they did too. The glory of our common humanity indeed is that it is nothing uncommon for men to be willing to die for truth, or duty, or love. There are always men who would leap at the chance of any mode of death that would lift the whole world to a new level of welfare. This is no depreciation of Jesus, but rather the just recognition of infinite values in human life to which a whole host of noble people have risen.

There are different versions of Jesus' last words upon the cross. Matthew and Mark, following apparently the earlier tradition, dwell upon the sad cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This would seem to stand for the last abandonment of hope in Jesus' mind that the arm of God would come to his rescue. Luke, on the contrary, following a later tradition, omits this cry of despair and gives instead the beautiful words: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do;" and, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." We are left in doubt as to which mood of mind, the despairing or hopeful, Jesus at last took. We should be glad to

believe the latter, for the like of which we could cite other brave instances.

Let us turn now from the too meager material, which serves to furnish our imagination for the portrait of the great and lovable Jesus, to consider another and somewhat perplexing variety of material.

As with other human lives, so with Jesus' life, there is, even in the scanty glimpses of him given in the Gospels, more or less matter of difficulty, misunderstanding or outright inconsistency. We have to mention first Jesus' habitual attitude toward the class known as Pharisees. He never seems to show them any sympathy. He upbraids and denounces them and calls them by harsh names, as hypocrites, as a generation of vipers,[16] and, if one could believe the Fourth Gospel, as "children of the wicked one:" "Ye are of your father the devil."[17] Few realize how many such passages there are. It is easy to go with these denunciations against people whom we do not like. But Jesus' doctrine of forgiveness "until

[16] Matthew xii. 34.
[17] John viii. 44, cf. Matt. xxiii. 15.

seventy times seven," as well as the general law of love, would seem to raise a great moral interrogation mark against the considerable mass of such passages which characterize his public utterances. Why should not all kinds of spiritual disease, and not only the vices of the poor require patience and sympathy? Certain it is that the world has gone on for hundreds of years citing Jesus' example for all kinds of denunciation of the poor against the rich and of the virtuous against the profligate, especially against the sins of those who are not in our own social group.

This consideration is brought out all the more strongly in the tremendous incident of Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple.[18] Note that the last Gospel sets this story at the beginning of Jesus' public life. This story matches indeed with the theory of a supernatural and terrible Messiah. But as the story of an actual man, it is nothing less than an act of anarchy, like lynch law. However noble Jesus' purpose (supposing the story a true one), he did as in the case of John

[18] Matt. xxi. 12; Mark xi. 15; Luke xix. 45; John ii. 15.

Brown at Harper's Ferry, what he had no right to do. Why did he not condemn the conventional bloody sacrifices that went on in the temple? For, if the sacrifices were necessary, the worshipers must somehow be provided with the necessary animals to offer at the altars. Why was this not as legitimate a business as that of the priests? At any rate, as a man, Jesus had no warrant to lift the whip over men and to destroy their property.

The stories of the Gadarenes' swine and the cursing of the fig tree are both incredible and unworthy of the Jesus whom we love to admire.[19] We will throw them aside. What shall we say of his treatment of the poor Syro-Phenician woman?[20] Do you say that Jesus' harsh words to her, likening her to a dog, were only used to bring her faith into relief? But this answer does not commend Jesus' method to our sense of delicate fitness. Moreover, the words fall into line with the instructions to the apostles, not to go into the way of the Gentiles or into any city of the Samari-

[19] Mark v. 12 and xi. 12.
[20] Mark vii. 26.

tans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.[21] This type of narrowness certainly makes discord with the keynote of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Grant that we are free to discard these sayings, as an alien growth upon the pure words of Jesus. Yet it is hard to see how they can have been put into Jesus' mouth in the face of a clear and consistent doctrine to the contrary. Is it not easier to believe that Jesus was like many another good but quite human teacher in the utterance of varying moods and strata of thought? We shall have occasion to return to this same problem later, when we take up the two aspects of Jesus' teachings.

If we care now to turn once more to the Fourth Gospel, there is a well-known passage, mistranslated in the common version, where Jesus tells the people that he is not going up to the Feast in Jerusalem, whereas the context makes it quite plain that he really is on his way there.[22] I do not attribute this apparent prevarication to Jesus. I only mention it to

[21] Matt. x. 6.
[22] John vii. 8.

illustrate the fact that neither the author of the Gospel, nor probably any one else at that time, would have thought it wrong to prevaricate.

Neither do I attribute to Jesus the harsh word to his mother at the wedding at Cana: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" But that it could have been related so naively shows how far from nice the ideal standard of the time was in Jesus' age.

We have still to meet the harsh, though somewhat mystical, conduct of Jesus toward his mother and brethren as told in Matthew xii. 46 etc. We should prefer to drop this passage from the narrative.

Emphasizing again how few passages there are in all the Gospels which throw any light on Jesus' real personality, I hasten on now to the comparatively full description of his trial and death. I cannot here avoid a perplexity that grows upon me the more I consider it. From the older and orthodox point of view it was necessary that Jesus should be put to death for the salvation of mankind. It was so necessary that it may have seemed justifiable to provoke men's anger against their innocent

victim so as to secure the fated doom.[23] All this theological prearrangement seems to us modern men artificial and incredible. It will not fit into a reasonable philosophy. The assumed character does not fit our ethical ideal. The question then recurs, why Jesus should have incurred death? The story, shorn of its supernatural features, does not hold together. It fails at least to give us a clear understanding of the *animus* of Jesus' enemies, or of Jesus' conduct.

We have yet to consider the problem of his alleged claim to some kind of Messiahship. It it enough to say now that if, as Prof. N. Schmidt[24] and others think, he never claimed to be a Messiah at all, the reason for putting him to death grows even more obscure. Did he court death, as afterwards the martyrs did in his name? We should hope not. Why then did he not make some simple and dignified answer in the palace of the High Priest to relieve him, as well as his enemies, of the mistaken ideas of his message and purpose? Why

[23] Matt. xvi. 21; Luke xix. 31, etc.
[24] *The Prophet of Nazareth.*

did he not put up a word to save their souls from the oncoming crime of murder? For his silence in such a situation must have been almost a fresh provocation to anger. Is it even possible that he uttered the stinging words in Mark xiv. 62 about the coming day of judgment when his enemies should see him riding in the clouds?

If you say, as we probably must, that we have no accurate account of the trial, the question still presses:—Why did the man of goodwill, the man of the beatitudes and the Golden Rule, make such bitter and stubborn enemies as to suffer a judicial murder at their hands? Was their hatred related to the story of his conduct toward the money-changers in the temple, and to an habitual denunciation of the leaders and teachers of his people? We cannot help being troubled by this question. We do not ask a high-minded man to be eager to save his own life. We do ask consideration not to let men blindly commit a cruel crime. Something known as "the spirit of Jesus" has taught us a certain sympathy with the stupid, misguided, excited humanity, which by some fatal

misapprehension had been stirred to enmity against a friendly man.

The point that I want to bring out is that the story is told in all the Gospels upon the distinct messianic presupposition, that it was necessary, and that Jesus knew it was necessary, to meet a violent death. His will apparently was to die. This leaves us with a grave problem of conduct, or else in a state of bewilderment as to the accuracy of our knowledge of the facts of his end.

It is evident by this time that no one can make anything but a vague and merely conjectural narrative of the life of Jesus. The points of our information are not near enough together to light up a continuous pathway. Asking simply what the facts are, we may summarize what we know with fair probability as follows: Jesus was born a little before the assumed date of 1 A. D. in the little town of Nazareth in Galilee. His father was Joseph, a carpenter, and his mother was Mary. He was the eldest of a family of several children and he was brought up to his father's trade. He seems to have had some teaching in the

Jewish Scriptures such as may have been provided in the synagogue. He knew at least something of the Psalms and the prophecy of Isaiah. The period was one of unusual susceptibility to religious interest throughout the Roman Empire. In Judea a notable man of the prophetic type, John the Baptist, proclaimed a popular revival of simple and ethical religion. Jesus' mind was stirred by this movement. How he prepared himself for his characteristic work, whether he spent a period in the life of the desert, whether he had been touched at all by the ideas of the puritan and ascetic sect of the Essenes, whether he had personal acquaintance with John, we may not say. He had certainly got at the heart of the religion of his remarkable race. It was his habit to retire to the wilderness for rest and refreshment and mystical communion.

He was a grown man of thirty years old, it is said, when he began his public life. He appeared first as a teacher in his own region of Galilee, with the town of Capernaum upon the Lake as the center of his journeyings. He made friends and disciples among the fisher-

men and others of similar social position. He taught wherever he found people, sometimes using the democratic freedom of the synagogue, sometimes gathering hearers by the shore of the Lake or in the open country. We follow him in one journey as far as the coast of the Mediterranean in the region of Tyre. How often he had been to Jerusalem before the last fatal visit we do not know, nor how far he had ever made friends in the capital. Wherever he went disciples seem to have attended him. He taught with authority; that is, with the sense of the reality of his message. Jesus was not merely a prophet of the righteous life or a teacher of a simple religion. He was reported to be a wonderful healer. People followed him with their sick. It was believed that by laying his hands upon them, or even by a word, he could effect a cure. He began his mission, however, with a singular unwillingness to be known publicly, least of all as a worker of miracles.[25] As the short period of

[25] The impression from the Synoptic Gospels is in marked contrast to the account in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus works miracles, not so much out of compassion as in order to command men's belief in him.

his public life drew to a close, he put aside the earlier habit of diffidence and assumed the position of a leader.

Jesus' unconventional habits of life, his free intercourse with the poor and despised classes, and his open sympathy with them, his frank moral judgments, and in all probability a certain aggressiveness of tone, a growing use of the weapons of denunciation and a claim to a certain official superiority as a unique messenger of God, antagonized men and specially the ruling class, who resented his treatment of them and their manner of life. He appears to have expected a collision with the authorities. Something of popular demonstration in his favor in his last visit to Jerusalem, together with a disturbance in the temple area when Jesus assailed the business of the venders there, seems to have brought the opposition against him to a head. In some sense, easily misunderstood, he was believed to have claimed to be the expected deliverer or Messiah of his people. The charge finally written over the cross, "The king of the Jews," represents this idea. With jealousy on the part of the priests

and others whom he had angered, and no great reluctance on the part of the Roman Governor to get rid of a possible exciter of the people, he was speedily condemned to the death of a malefactor. His friends all deserted him.

In the whole narrative about Jesus, there is nothing, aside from the implication of the wonder-stories (which are no more wonderful than those related in Exodus and the Books of the Kings) that would lift him into a lonely uniqueness above the class of other illustrious prophets or teachers of religion. The claim for any absolute perfectness of character, other than the ever admirable greatness of a high and single purpose, is a quite gratuitous assumption. It does not proceed from the record, but from dogmatic prepossessions that grew up afterwards. The fact remains that we can know extremely little of the details of Jesus' life.

III

TWO KINDS OF TEACHING

The chief mode of approach to the personality of Jesus has always been, and must remain through his teachings. Would that we certainly knew which, and which only, are his own! We begin at once with certain immortal passages, all of which together, like so much precious gold, may be comprised within a very brief compass.[1] We have, thus, the beatitudes, the most impressive and far-reaching of all spiritual truth, gathered largely out of the scattered veins of the Old Testament ore, and here fitted as it were into a coronet. I have already raised the question who first put these great verses together. The same question arises as to the whole structure of the so-called Sermon on the Mount, as contained in Mat-

[1] There are about fifty verses in Mark that may be fairly called notable or universal teachings. Adding similar material found in Matthew and in Luke we may estimate the amount of this high quality at about two hundred and twenty-five verses, or four to five chapters.

thew.[2] We can hardly think it possible that all this most solid of ethical teaching was given by Jesus in a single block, either to his unlearned disciples, hardly able yet to unravel the parables, or much less to a multitude of people, in a single sitting. We have here, however, doubtless the greatest and most characteristic ideas of Jesus; about the chief end of man's life, about the relations of brotherhood, about forgiveness, about purity; about oaths and vows, about non-resistance; about alms-giving, fasting and prayer; about the true treasure; against anxiety, against harsh or hasty judgment, or perhaps even any judgment of one's fellows; about the test of character by its acts; about doing the good will of God as compared with saying the good words. The culminating sentences of the whole collection are not at the end of the section, but at the close of the fifth chapter of Matthew, where Jesus likens the divine goodness to the constancy of the sunshine, and lays down the rule that man's goodness or good will ought

[2] It is noticeable that the form is quite different and much more quotable than the similar material in Luke. Compare the Beatitudes with Luke vi. 20, etc.

normally to be like God's, equally all around and constant to all men. There is no teaching higher than this. One wonders if he who first uttered it could possibly have realized how profound and far-reaching this is. Why should we insist upon thinking this?

Jesus is sometimes credited with original teaching about the Fatherhood of God. He certainly seems to have taken up, and adopted and realized this idea. Of course it was running in the thought of his people.[3] It was not an uncommon idea among early peoples who often assumed that men were sons of the gods. The sentences known as the Lord's Prayer bring this idea into prominence, and what is more, into familiar use. We are obliged even here, however, to notice the mixture of thought. It is a father up in heaven, a father who tempts his children, a father set over against "the evil one." The substance of the prayer is in the words "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."[4]

Outside of the Sermon on the Mount, the

[3] See I Chron. xxix. 10; Isa. vi. 16; Mal. ii. 10.

[4] See the prayer in the revised version.

greatest positive teachings of Jesus may be briefly summarized as follows: First and most important of all, is the Parable of the Good Samaritan.[5] The great law of universal love, already taught in the Old Testament, but almost buried under the mass of priestly ceremonies, ritual and ecclesiasticism, needed clear illustration which this parable very beautifully furnishes. Perhaps the beauty of Jesus' story is not so much that the conduct is new or strange, as that it is told of a despised and alien class. It is as if a story of heroism were told to white men of a negro or a Chinaman.

The next great parable is the story of the Prodigal Son.[6] This parable has always made an appeal to the imagination of the world. It is the everlasting justification of the lover of the outcast and the fallen. It is a story of the absolute radicalism of the law of forgiveness. No atonement—no sacrifice is here called for. The single essential requirement is that the wrong-doer shall repent and return to his duty.

[5] Luke x. It is curious, that the early memorabilia of Mark do not contain this story.

[6] Luke xv.

The parables of the kingdom of heaven[7] form a cluster by themselves. They would seem to be Jesus' own words, if anything is. The interest in them to modern minds is the rather remarkable suggestion of the doctrine of quiet development or growth, whether of the individual character, or of social and human betterment. This goes with the familiar words, "The kingdom of God is within you," or shall we say, "among you," or "here"?[8] This doctrine, taken by itself, is very fine gold, but as we have presently to see, it is involved with much alien material. Indeed, the passage in Luke that follows these striking verses is one of the most tremendous warnings of how out of a quiet appearance the day of doom may suddenly sound.

"He that findeth his life shall lose it and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it,"[9] carries the memorable hint of a great law, namely "To die to live." It goes with the splendid verse quoted by Paul in Acts as from

[7] Matthew xiii.; Mark iv.

[8] Note also, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." Luke xvii. 20, 21.

[9] Matthew x. 39.

Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." [10] That is, life is not in mere getting but in outgo and expression. "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister" [11] is the same teaching. There is nothing greater. The familiar and tender text, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden" [12] deserves mention here. It is to be observed however that it probably fits in with the Messianic passages, and stands or falls according to our interpretation of them.

Memorable and characteristic is Jesus' teaching about the Sabbath.[13] In short, all forms and rules are for man. Likewise, his teaching about things clean and unclean,[14] "That which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man."

Closest to Jesus' heart and oftenest repeated seems to have been the doctrine of forgiveness. "I say not until seven times, but until seventy times seven." [15] Strangely

[10] Acts xx. 35.
[11] Matthew xx. 26 to 28.
[12] Matthew xi. 28 to 30.
[13] Matthew xii. 1 to 14.
[14] Matthew xv. 11.
[15] Matthew xviii. 22.

enough, however, Jesus seems to threaten, in the parable of the two servants which follows, that God himself may not always forgive, as a man ought, but being wroth, will turn over the unforgiving man to the tormentors for ever!

The grand law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbor as thyself,"[16] is given us very interestingly in Luke x. 25 as from the mouth of the questioner, as if indeed it were already in the common teaching of Jesus' people. It draws of course from earlier prophetic traditions, as, for example, from the beautiful teaching of Jonah.[17]

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican praying in the temple[18] is a plain object lesson of Jesus' constant teaching against arrogance and pretense. We find here the key note of his life, recurring like a refrain. It is the Old Testament idea, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Another of Jesus' mottoes, prominent in the Lord's

[16] Matt. xxii. 37.

[17] See the remarkable passages in Lev. xix. 10, 15, 17, 18, 34.

[18] Luke xviii. 9, etc.

Prayer and emphasized in the story of Gethsemane is the word, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." [19] The words, though lacking in the other Gospels, attributed here to Jesus, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," [20] seem to set the crown upon our highest idea of Jesus.

We have already observed that, beautiful as the highest teachings of Jesus are, they are not to be supposed to stand as the only summits of ancient thought. Not to speak of other writings, there are passages as grand in the Old Testament, for example, the words from Micah, "What doth the Lord require of thee but to deal justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." [21] The splendid passage from the Wisdom of Solomon [22] about the heavenly wisdom also occurs to our minds, which "in all ages entering into holy souls maketh them friends of God and prophets." Also "For thou lovest all the things that are and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made." [23]

[19] Matthew xxvi. 39.
[20] Luke xxiii. 34.
[21] Micah vi. 8.
[22] Chapter vii.
[23] Wisdom xi. 24.

The great teaching from 1 Corinthians xiii, about love, is quite as wonderful as anything in the Gospels. There are also certain remarkable verses about love in the Johannine writings: "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." [24]

One might gladly wish that Jesus' teachings matched throughout with the remarkable and universal passages which we have already cited. But our study, if candid, must now proceed to take account of a large number of passages, greater far in volume than all which we have instanced, which stir anew very difficult questions touching Jesus' personality and doctrine.[25]

Take first, the text "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." [26]

[24] I John iv. 7.

[25] We find in the Synoptic Gospel, besides the two hundred verses or more of greater teachings already referred to, perhaps four hundred verses or the amount of eight chapters, which must be classed as of distinctly lower, and some of it even dubious worth. Such is the considerable volume of eschatological teaching, as in Matt. xxiv., and the passages touching demonology. Some of this material, perhaps a third of it, or as much as three chapters, presents real ethical difficulty to the modern mind.

[26] Mark iii. 28, 29.

Even Professor Schmidt in *The Prophet of Nazareth,* free as he is in discarding many of Jesus' supposed sayings, leaves this as a genuine and characteristic utterance. But perhaps no word of Jesus has carried more terror, or imposed heavier suffering upon tender consciences. It constitutes almost a radical denial of Jesus' own doctrine of forgiveness. Here is "a sin unto death," not clearly described, which the Almighty will not bear with. God is not so good then, as man ought to be!

This is not a random teaching of Jesus. It runs through the warp and woof of the New Testament. In Jesus' common thought the world, so far from being a universe, is a theater of divided powers, a scheme of dualism. There is heaven above and angels; there is hell below and devils. There are men like "the good seed," "the good ground," the good fish caught in the net; the good sheep. There are also bad men, as if by nature, like the tares in the wheat, the bad fish, the evil ground, the goats on the left hand at the judgment seat. There is a constant doctrine of opposition in the New Testament. Jesus loves the poor and

oppressed. Does he love the Pharisees? It would seem not. But why not? This doctrine of antagonism perhaps will prove to account for the mode of Jesus' death. Toward a considerable class of his fellows, he never shows a touch of that graciousness and kindly forbearance which he inculcates among his own disciples toward one another. Is not this so? Look at some of the evidences of this fact. Thus Jesus likens the towns which reject him to Sodom and Gomorrah, and threatens them with the same fate.[27] His teaching of hell and torment is as clear, full and tremendous as any hyper-Calvinistic divine could have made it.[28] His teachings have been the inexhaustible arsenal from which passionate men have drawn their material for the inhuman and unbearable doctrine of eternal punishment. The faith of "Universalism" has its severest blows from the mouth of Jesus.

This type of teaching is just as conspicuous in the group of parables concerning the kingdom of heaven as anywhere else.[29] The tares

[27] Matthew x. 14, etc.
[28] Matthew xviii. 8, etc.; xxiii. 33.
[29] Matt. xiii.

are burnt in the fire. "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." This is the repeated refrain. Moreover, it goes with the thought of the parables. Recall also the refrain: "Where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." [30]

Do you try to urge that these numerous teachings were added by another hand? Even if this were possible, the fact remains that Jesus' disciples never understood him as putting aside or doubting the current popular ideas about the next life, the judgment of the world, and the overwhelming fate of the mass of human kind. "Are there few that be saved?" they enquire. And Jesus says, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat." [31] Speaking of the case of the relapse of a man from whom an evil spirit had been expelled Jesus explains that "seven other spirits more wicked" than the first have entered the man. "Even so," he adds significantly, "Shall it be unto this wicked genera-

[30] Mark ix. 44, 46, 48.
[31] Matt. vii. 13.

tion."[32] He teaches in parables. Why? Not, as you would suppose, in order to help people understand, but he is made to quote by way of answer to this question a tremendous passage from Isaiah, "Because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."[33] Jesus warns even his disciples to "enter into life halt, or maimed, or blind, rather than to be cast with two hands or feet into everlasting fire."[34]

I have mentioned three noble parables out of nearly thirty. The fact is, if you remove these three, the parable of the sower, the short ones about the kingdom of heaven, the beautiful little parable of the lost sheep, and the story of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Temple, you will have left indeed considerable interesting and suggestive matter, but you will have exhausted pretty nearly all high ethical and spiritual value from the parables.

[32] Matt. xii. 45.

[33] Matt. xiii. 15.

[34] Matt. xviii. 6, etc. Luke is especially full of teachings quite as hard for the conscience, as the wonder-stories of the Bible are difficult for the reason. Luke iv. 24–28; vi. 23–27; x. 11–17; xi. 29–33, 46–53; xii. 9, 10, 46–49, 51–54; xiii. 2–10, 24–31; xiv. 21–27; xvi. 23–31; xvii. 26–37; xix. 22–28; xx. 9–19; xxi. 34–37.

Take, for example, the rich man and Lazarus.[35] There is no clear moral teaching here. The poor man goes to Abraham's bosom apparently only because he has been poor, not because he has been holy or patient. What a terrific picture of Dives in hell, where he cannot be forgiven or respited, even though his humanity is awakened to go and save his brethren! The Wedding Feast,[36] the Wise and Foolish Virgins and the Talents,[37] picturesque as they are, are morally more or less vitiated for our use by the inhuman ending of each of them. They overshoot the ethical mark, and make the way of religion unlovely.

The parable of the Sheep and the Goats likewise blends splendid teaching, as to the true test of men's lives, with the awful and radically unjust idea of the spectacular judgment day, and the final separation of the bad and the good.[38] Do these unfortunate "goats," selfish and thoughtless as they have been, deserve eternal damnation, as if they were a caste

[35] Luke xvi.
[36] Matt. xxii and Luke xii.
[37] Matt. xxv.
[38] Matt. xxv.

apart from the rest of humanity? Nevertheless, Jesus' mighty authority has been cited, and with overwhelming reasons, through nearly twenty Christian centuries for a mode of doctrine, touching our common human nature, which has helped to sanction almost every conceivable barbarity and torture. Did not God hate his enemies, as in the story of the Marriage Feast? Did he not turn over the guilty to torment? Did he not separate the bad from the good? If Jesus' word was apparently good for anything, it held good to support all this baleful eschatology. You cannot easily get rid of it and only save such material as pleases you, for example, the Sermon on the Mount. The same teaching is also explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount.[39]

I am aware that many students believe that the long chapters, especially in Matthew, touching the end of the world and the last things, are a late addition to the Gospels. If this is so, Jesus surely never seems to have said a word to discourage these current ideas. You have also at once to suppose another author

[39] See Matt. v. 22, 29, 30; vii. 13, 14, 22, 23, etc.

for a number of the parables. Grant, however, that a later hand is responsible for all this momentous teaching. This teaching had without doubt a most powerful influence in the reception and spread of the new religion. We are then confronted with another interesting problem of authorship. It was no feeble hand that composed the tremendous chapters to which we refer and these grand and awful parables. This is the hand of a prophet. It would look now, contrary to the ordinary impression, but in line with all the analogies of history, as if we had not merely the figure of one man, Jesus, all alone, but a group of remarkable personalities—Paul, the anonymous author of the Johannine writings, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, besides those who put the Synoptic Gospels into shape. It may be true as Matthew Arnold has suggested, that Jesus was above the head of his disciples, but it begins now to look more as if the new religion must have owed its existence to a succession of great individualities, all of them worthy to be compared with the earlier prophets.

The supposition, however, of unknown but

powerful writers, who may have supplemented Jesus' teachings with more or less fresh material, leaves the figure of Jesus himself even more obscure and fragmentary. Where does the authentic teaching of Jesus leave off and these others begin? No one knows or ever can know. How far was Jesus responsible for the more extreme and terrific doctrine, which was evidently in the air while he lived, and which he seems to have done nothing to controvert?

It is evident that the point of view to which we have come, though it may at first seem disappointing, brings immediate compensation. The common idea of Jesus' unique personality, or perfectness of character, carries almost inevitably a subtle respect for the authority of all his teaching and for every motion in his attitude. Even when modern men will not quote the New Testament doctrines, however explicit they are, about devils and hell, they still use Jesus's mighty example for treating their fellows with antagonism and denunciation.[40] There has thus been a profound ethical

[40] In the recent report of a minister's farewell sermon he says: "We, all of us, forget what manner of man Jesus was." He goes on to say: "That same Jesus pronounced

difficulty in the theory of Jesus' uniqueness from which we are now relieved. The fact is, that our highest spiritual ideal will not permit us to believe that the sanguinary words put into Jesus' mouth could proceed from a man wholly possessed with the spirit of God. We shall have occasion to refer to this fact again.

upon the aristocracy of Jerusalem such woes as have never been matched in the world's language of doom. That same Jesus, finding the money changers in the temple, lashed the sordid crew out of the holy place and hurled their money after them. If a minister to-day following his Master should do any of these things, he would not only be pronounced uncharitable, but ungoverned in temper, possibly insane." We ask, would not this be a fair judgment upon such a minister? Unfortunately, this use of Jesus' words and example is too common, even with most estimable people. Did such use of Jesus' authority ever do any humane service or help to overcome evil? Is it not well to free men from the bondage of a theory which thus sets up antagonisms and alienates them from one another?

IV

THE QUESTION OF MESSIAHSHIP

We have now to consider one of the most perplexing of all the questions about Jesus' personality. How far did he take himself to be in some sense or other the special messenger of God, a unique being, a Messiah, or anointed one, a King of kings, if not to rule the nations, yet at least their lord in a spiritual domain? Conflicting opinions rage over this point. On the one hand, the keynote of all the Gospels is doubtless the idea of Messiahship or Christship, out of which the creeds of Christendom grew. On the other hand, it is now held that Jesus was quite or almost innocent of such teaching and that this idea grew up after his death. Professor Schmidt's new book, *The Prophet of Nazareth,* makes this contention the learned issue of his study. The term "son of man," he tells us, so far from having a unique and personal application to Jesus'

office, is simply the Syriac term for man. Thus man, not Christ, is lord of the Sabbath. Not Jesus alone, but man then is come to seek and to save the lost? Shall *man* then preside at the judgment? [1]

It seems to me most likely that the Messianic idea of Jesus grew up, doubtless with the help and suggestion of his disciples, from the seed of his original words. It is not easy at all otherwise to explain so numerous a group of passages ascribed to him. The origin and growth of the resurrection stories seem also more likely to have come with Jesus' help, by way of preparation for them, than without any such help. They also came, I surmise, along with a wave of interest and belief in occult and psychical phenomena, of which we get hints in the Gospels, as for example, in the story of Herod's theory of the reincarnation of John the Baptist in the person of Jesus,[2] in the story of Jesus walking on the sea,[3] in the legend of the transfiguration,[4] as well as in the ghostly

[1] Matt. xxv. 31. Compare xii. 32; xx. 18, 28; Mark viii. 38; xiv. 21; Luke vii. 34; ix, 44; xii. 40; xviii. 8; xix. 10.

[2] Matt. xiv. 2.

[3] Matt. xiv.

[4] Matt. xvii.

appearances in Jerusalem after Jesus' death.[5] Would it not be far more likely that Jesus, the child of his age, might have shared in, and given occasional expression to ideas which were immediately in the air all ready to be uttered, than that he should have been free of such ideas—a modern man before his time? No one can easily explain his very frequent assumption of some species of unique and authoritative character, except by the quite natural belief that he took himself to be—I will not urge more than a man, but a man appointed by God for a peculiar mission.

This idea was congruous with the prophetic office, and specially with the passages which he loved to quote from the book of Isaiah.[6] You certainly have to do violence to his language in order to dissociate the centrality of his own person from numerous passages. The more than prophetic "I" and "mine," while not so exaggerated as in the Fourth Gospel, yet run all through the Synoptic Gospels. The very words "Come unto me all ye that labor,"

[5] Matt. xxix. 52, 53.
[6] See Luke iv. 18.

emphasize this centrality of thought. He seems to call disciples to him and to be known as their Master. What does the verse about the bridegroom being taken away, after which his disciples will fast, mean?[7] Why does he seem to say so much about "my sake" and "my name?" "Whosoever shall deny me will I also deny."[8] Why should the least in the kingdom of heaven be greater than John the Baptist?[9] The words "son of man" hardly make sense, if you always insist upon translating them to mean merely man. "The son of man came eating and drinking and they say, 'Behold a friend of publicans and sinners.'"[10] Here is a very emphatic mode of saying "I," as apart from ordinary men. "He that soweth the good seed is the son of man."[11] This is another emphatic *I*. Why again does Jesus seem to put away his own family relations in favor of the wider relationship to his disciples?[12] Shall we rule out altogether the tradition of the profound interest of people generally, of Herod, of John the Baptist, of Jesus' own disciples, especially of

[7] Mark ii. 18, etc
[8] Matt. x. 33.
[9] Luke vii. 28.
[10] Matt. xi. 19.
[11] Matt. xiii. 37.
[12] Matt. xii. 50.

Peter,[13] in speculating as to Jesus' office and claims? Can we keep just what we like in the story of the interview between Jesus and Zebedee's sons[14] and suppose that nothing at all was said of a kingdom of glory, in which, after the impending crisis of sorrow, the disciples hoped to share?

Again, why did the authorities put Jesus to death, if he claimed nothing beyond the gift of ordinary prophecy? What assumption of authority could have led to that extraordinary story of the cleansing of the temple? What else but the sense of Messiahship could have made him so silent beneath the questions at his trial? How shall we explain the alleged inscription on the cross, "The king of the Jews?"

Jesus' singular unwillingness to be publicly known deserves attention here. If we can believe the tradition, he habitually imposes silence about himself, at least in the early part of his ministry, on one and another of the sick whom he has treated. It may be said that this tallies with the sentences which urge the doctrine of a

[13] Matt. xvi. 13, etc.
[14] Mark x. 35, etc.

quiet coming of the kingdom, without violence and observation, as we to-day think it comes. I raise the question whether these verses do not all lend themselves to a different interpretation? One of the great motives of Jesus' life seems to have been the beatitude, "Blessed are the Meek." The law of the world, he teaches, is that the mighty shall be brought down and the lowly exalted. He has accordingly an instinctive dread of being put forward and made a popular hero. The idea of a suffering type of leadership, taken from Isaiah, has impressed his mind. Through the gate of suffering, humiliation and even death lies the way of victory. None the less, but all the more, may he claim and expect final exaltation. The lowly shall be exalted. That is his creed. There is nothing inconsistent between this thought and the expectation of the coming of a "great and terrible day of the Lord," a day of retribution. This tremendous equalizing of accounts and rewards is indeed the fact to be looked for. The familiar text about the kingdom of God coming "not with observation" now tallies with this idea of the lowly Messiah,

who through the valley of humiliation is on his way to glory.

Even we modern men are able to hold both ideas in solution at one and the same time; on one hand, the thought of a ceaseless law of evolution, the possibility also on the other hand of epochs of seemingly rapid and even revolutionary movement. Both ideas have truth in them and fall back on analogies in nature. We are inclined therefore to think that Jesus did distinctly, naturally and sincerely voice the expectation of his age, looking toward some sort of a catastrophe and a miraculous renovation of social conditions. This seems altogether more likely than that he failed to share the common hopes of his oppressed and imaginative people in favor of an interposition of their God in their favor. He doubtless believed that he was the chosen leader in the way of the new hope. He spoke with an assumption of authority. He doubtless thought himself gifted to heal the sick and to drive out the demons. People rallied to him and responded to his treatment, carried away by the contagion of his own conviction and hope. All this is quite

in line with what we know of the psychic working of human nature.

It may be objected that this thought of Jesus makes him less simple than we had supposed. It gives a double aspect to his character. But it does not make him less human or natural. Let us use a familiar historical illustration—one of many that might be cited. It is the case of Savonarola, the great Florentine preacher and reformer. Perhaps no man of higher, nobler or more austere virtue and purpose ever lived. On one side, you have the pure gold of a great and constant devotion, true till death, a generous humanity, an overwhelming sense of common duties and practical ideals. On the other hand you see a man of prophetic visions, the child of the Middle Ages, ruled by the superstitions of his people, one day working with sane mind for reform through the sure development of the institutions of Florence, the next day confidently expecting the miraculous interposition of angels. At his best and noblest he preached the doctrine of love. All the same, and with no sense of incongruity, he denounced the rulers of his people and stirred

the antagonism of men with his passion, subtly akin really to the passions of the men whom he denounced.

A query arises here whether there may not lie in human nature, like tinder ready to be fired, an astonishing and almost infinite readiness, more than men are aware of, to be set apart, anointed and crowned as martyrs or leaders. Thus, the fishermen of the lake of Galilee are ready immediately to be princes in the new realm. Thus daily, ill-equipped American citizens set themselves up for the highest offices. Thus, priests and ministers imagine themselves to be worthy of superior dignities and privileges and to deserve to live in palaces, or again to be given titles above other men. Is there not a sort of faculty of Messiahship latent in men? On its lower side it shows itself in the extraordinary egotism and conceit of quite mediocre men. On its best side, it is close to the infinite and divine element in humanity. "We know not what we shall be," inasmuch as we partake of the nature of God. The founders of religions and of sects have thus commonly thought themselves to be appointed of

God. The recent story of Babism is a good illustration of this fact. Other cases easily occur. For example, some may recall a man of very noble nature, a rather conspicuous figure among radical American thinkers in the last century, who refusing the name of Master to Jesus though at the cost of personal loss and suffering, yet fondly thought of himself as a sort of philosophic Messiah, whose teachings only needed to be followed by mankind to solve the doubts of the world!

Suppose now a man of profound spiritual genius, such a man as Moses might have been, or a man of commanding personality, such as Daniel Webster was to his contemporaries. Bring him to birth centuries ago, in a land where God was thought to speak to man in the dreams of the night. Let him be born at a period when all sorts of wonderful ideas were dawning on the world. Possess him with the tradition of the prophets. Fill his soul with ardor for his oppressed people. Let him fast and pray in lonely mountains. Let him hear voices and dream dreams. Let him in imagination fight battles with the arch-foe of souls.

Lift him in insight above the people around him and let him hear their words of admiration at his splendid gifts. You have thus the natural material for the idea of some sort of Messiahship. All the more the praise of Jesus that his thought took the form of the meek.[15] The more meek the man was, the higher the coming exaltation. This was at the heart of Jesus' doctrine. In his age, however, such meekness demanded a coming glory and victory to match it. Meekness was not inconsistent with the punishment and humiliation of his enemies. The more they triumphed in this world, the surer their doom would be in the next. This is the steady teaching of the New Testament. It seems to have been the thought of Jesus. If he knew better, alas, that he did not make the humane teaching plain! If now and then he hit close to the mark of the universal doctrine of love, he seems never to have worked this doctrine out into its consistent application in detail. How could he have done so immense a task as that, in the face of the prepossessions

[15] See the parable about taking "the lowest room" at the feast. Luke xiv. 7, etc.

of his age and the demonology that haunted the world? As well expect Franklin to have worked out the theory of the newly found theory of electricity into the applications of Edison and Marconi.

The fact is, in taking account of Jesus' life and person, we can never afford to leave his theology out of our sight. It looks as if his God was thought of as literally a "person," in the narrower sense of the word, seated somewhere in heaven and ruling the world through the offices of his angels. Did Jesus ever anywhere clearly state the wonderful doctrine of the Fourth Gospel, "God is Spirit?" Never does he give a word of release from the almost Persian conception of the divided world and the Satanic kingdom. His faith is that God will at last triumph over the devil. Here is the naive basis of a theology altogether different from what modern men can believe. The natural underlying practical conclusion is the final separation of the evil from the good. This idea has been the gloomy burden of the theology of Christendom. It had been woven into the warp and woof of the traditional

Christianity. Jesus' great name is still used to sanction it.

We have already seen that we may never expect to recover a veritable likeness of Jesus. We have not the necessary authentic material. But more than that, the idea of Messiahship is inextricably in our way. It is not only wrought into the narrative. It is apparently also in the mind of Jesus. It was inevitable to his age. But it does not fit into the framework of our modern thought. It has become unhelpful ethically. The Messiah has the lineaments of a man, not the character of the God whom we worship. It is a Messiah who was mistaken, as for instance, in his prophecies of the end of the world.[16] The world is coming to learn the use of a greater word than the "I" of a Messiah. The noblest of leaders may not safely dwell on the centrality of his own person. The more modest words "we" and "ours" alone keep men safe and in orderly place in the ranks of the common humanity. No one may assume a sole authority over his fellows.

What then, you ask, shall we make of the

[16] See Matt. xvi. 28.

actual Jesus? We catch the suggestion of a grand and impressive figure, after the fashion of an Elijah or Isaiah, intense, passionate, devoted, prodigal of life, absolutely willing to go wherever the vision or the divine voice bids. He is a great lover and equally a strong hater. He is possessed with a sense of a supernatural mission which he must needs die to fulfil. He is sustained with a sense of coming victory, of death leading to life. He has caught the idea that the suffering of the good is a sort of price paid, as it really is, for the renewal of the life of the world. He believes that, in some peculiar sense, he is set apart to pay that kind of price. Passages from his favorite prophet sway his mind to this thought. More and more, as he approaches the end of his brief career, he is lifted, as many another prophet has been, with this overmastering sense of the exaltation of his office. There blends therefore with the touches of the common and genial humanity, an almost repellant impression of aloofness, as of one already the inhabitant of another and mystic realm. On this side Jesus is well-nigh unapproachable. Normal human

life is apart from this realm. It is the region of fanaticism and all religious extravagance. The characteristic of the earlier phases of religious experiences, such as William James has related, is a vein of what seems to us modern men morbid and shadowy. The characteristic of modern religious experience is that it seeks the sunlight, and must be at one with bodily health and sanity.

I am aware that others may find or create a very different picture of Jesus. It is easy to see only what pleases one. It is easy to imagine a lovable and gentle man, free of every Hebrew feature, in fact the best type of the present-day clergyman, affable, and tactful, a favorite at dinner parties. Is it at all certain the actual Jesus would be *persona grata* in the average home of the well-to-do citizen who prays in Jesus' name, more than he was in Pharisees' houses two thousand years ago? Recall his stern criticism of men's social and religious conventionalities.[17] How many people enjoy

[17] Read the story of Jesus in Simon's house, Luke vii. 36, etc.

meeting a genuine man who will tell them exactly what he thinks!

There is a common use of Jesus' life and character which deserves a word of consideration. I mean the complete idealization of Jesus, especially under the name of "Christ." Men tell us that they do not care who Jesus was "after the flesh," as Paul says, in view of their ideal of the perfect type of humanity. They therefore worship Christ, now become another more human, intimate and personal name for the idea of God present in human life. Men make under this name a beautiful and glorified conception of a human life, high enough to be called one with God. This is the Christocentric religion of "progressive orthodoxy."

Many go further than this. They report that they have had profound spiritual experiences of communion with "The Risen Christ." We do not deny the fact of a spiritual experience. We merely suggest that the name which it bears is the least essential part of it. Under all forms and many names men have had a sense of peace, gladness, a companionship too

high for words, and some kind of divine guidance. This is the central fact of religion. The validity of the experience evidently does not depend upon the name or the symbol used, or any particular image suggested in the mind. James Martineau who says "God," is as well served as Dr. Lyman Abbott, the favorite name of whose God seems to be "Christ." The man who sees no visions and has no dreams may rest in the thought of a divine universe in which all is well.

One may admit that this symbolism, like its kindred Mariolatry, is helpful and ennobling. But it is not and cannot be an acquaintance with, or an appreciation of the actual Jesus. Men who worship the Christ of their imagination as God certainly touch Jesus no more closely than the worshipers of Mary touch the actual mother of Jesus. The story of Jesus indeed suggests certain noble features which go to make up the imaginative conception of the ideal man. This process of idealization is like an artist's sketch in which one might not even recognize the actual forest and stream from which it has been suggested. Like the

picture, it is the work of the artistic or poetic faculty. It is not even necessary for the worshiper of Jesus as the ideal Christ to know him at all. It is like the worship of Mary, which may be ardent and uplifting, though no one knows anything about her. The difficulty of this use of the conception of Christ is that men confuse their ideal with bits of the ancient story. Their Christ, so far from being the highest ideal which they can conceive, is the man who called down woes upon his enemies. Such idealization perpetuates the spirit of enmity in the world.

V

JESUS AS THE FOUNDER OF CHRISTIANITY

The conventional questions may now be asked. How can the rise and history of Christianity be accounted for in any other way than upon the presupposition of a unique founder? For the most progressive nations are to-day accounted Christian. The Christian religion under some one of its forms is still winning converts. This seems at first a very formidable question, but the answer is much plainer than it is often made to appear. It grows out of a mass of familiar knowledge about the rise and development of religions.

In the first place there seems to be no ground to believe that the actual Jesus, even in the rôle of Messiah, ever intended to found a new religion. The old religion at its best was good enough for him. It was a religion of justice, mercy, peace, reverence. This was all that Jesus preached. It only needed to be freed

from its tribal narrowness and its vexatious details of ceremony in order to become a religion good enough for all men. The spirit of a broader humanity was already in the air. If Paul had really known the religion of his own people, as taught in the sixth chapter of Micah, it is hard to see to what else he would have needed to be converted. It is certain that with such a religion he could never have been a persecutor, much less an enemy of Jesus! Of all the denominations in Christendom the Quakers seem to have been nearest to Jesus' thought. If one fact is sure, it is that Jesus never founded the elaborate congeries of systems historically known as "Christianity." It is preposterous to suppose that he would have understood the claims, the colossal machinery and the magnificent pomp of the Roman Catholic and other sacerdotal churches.

As to the rise and development of Christianity, two quite different theories appear. One is that the mighty stream of Christian history is traceable back substantially to a single fountain or source, namely, the life and teaching of Jesus, as men may once have

guessed that the mysterious Nile had a single source. This idea seems to be out of line with all the analogies of history and of human life. The other thought is that the great stream flows from innumerable sources, with contributing fountains in every land and from every period of history, with daily accretions to-day, as if from the constant rain and the dew. The stream of religion flowed before Jesus was. A long line of unknown psalmists and lovers of righteousness fed the strong spring of his life, as from underground sources. A noble group of men, close to him and following him, each added the momentum of their lives to the new flow of the current. At this point the stream took Jesus' official name, as the continent of America took the name of Americus Vespucci, or might better have taken the name of Columbus, without the slightest word of disparagement of other brave and great voyagers who under a common inspiration sailed the same seas. The analogy between the founding of Christianity and the discovery of America is very suggestive. We have the same analogy in the history of every invention. No person

ever accomplishes anything alone. No one can be given the sole credit for any attainment.

The truth is, that the early Christianity obviously owed its success very largely to the indefatigable labors of Paul, whose genius took it out of the lines of a Jewish sect and gave it a *quasi* universal character. As Jesus founded no new religion, so he wrote no books and professed to bring no new doctrine. There is no certainty that he appointed apostles, least of all twelve in number. Suppose that he had merely emphasized the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, though in the clearest manner. Does any one imagine that a new religion could have been established and made to endure on this simple basis, in the age of Nero and in the face of Gothic invasions?

The primitive Christianity was involved with certain very natural, and fascinating ideas, lying close to the borderland of error, which, like alloy mixed with the gold, gave it common currency. One of these ideas, akin to the belief of modern spiritualists, was the bodily or physical resurrection of Jesus. This

appealed tremendously, as such a notion always does appeal, to the popular imagination. This was the burden of Paul's preaching, though he seems for himself not to have credited a physical resurrection so much as the repeated appearance of Jesus in his "spiritual body." [1]

The early Church also seems to have looked for the miraculous coming of their Lord from heaven to judge the world.[2] This was an idea to conjure with and to make converts. The grand expectation in the early Church that supernatural events were about to spring forth made such a book as the Apocalypse possible.

Again, the early Christianity, just like Christian Science to-day, was a vigorous health cult, all the more persuasive from the common delusion that devils were the cause of disease. The Christian healer, at the magic name of Jesus, could cast out the devils, and cure the sick. Imagine this idea removed from the early Christianity, and try to think what would have been the collapse of faith. These three great ideas, like so many strong strands, helped

[1] I Cor. xv. 44.
[2] See I Thess. vi. 14, etc.

mightily to hold Christians together, till the new religion came to be fortified with the priest-craft, the pomp and power of imperial Rome. Then it largely ceased to be Jesus' religion at all.

The development of Christianity from the working of natural means and the play of human motives, allies it with the rise of other great cults. Thus, while the Buddha gave a name to Buddhism, he certainly did not create the religion. But he served as an intermediary to give a new and popular turn to the prevailing religion of his people. A religion is always greater than its founder. Otherwise we should have to assume needless dignity for the authors of various modern cults. We have spoken of the Madonna worship. But no one outside of the Catholic Church thinks it necessary, in order to explain the origin of the worship, to suppose that Mary was better than other mothers. It is interesting to recall that in Paul's case, he seems not to have known Jesus "after the flesh," that is, the actual Jesus. His Jesus was an ideal person and all the more powerful. The relation of the founders of a

great religion to the course of its growth is like that of the founders of a nation or a dynasty. We gladly owe our thanks to King Alfred and Washington, but we owe our thanks to many another good patriot as well, without whose help we could never have heard of Alfred or Washington.

VI

CERTAIN POSITIVE CONCLUSIONS

It may be that the old word will be uttered again, at least in some form: "They have taken away my Lord." If we can never be sure what the actual Jesus was like, what becomes, you ask, of the "leadership of Jesus"? We answer, in the very words attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, and which contain a world of wise suggestion: "It is expedient for you that I go away." It is another instance of the familiar case where the vase that bore the exquisite perfume must be broken in order to use the perfume. The letter must go that the spirit may prevail.

To be perfectly frank, as we are bound to be by every consideration of honesty as well as religion, the actual and historical man Jesus is not, and has long since ceased to be, the one leader or Master in religious life, or in the progress of mankind. He is not the real au-

thority of the modern man in any church, either for conduct or religion.

Let us face this fact seriously, for it is very important. In the first place, the ideal man whom we modern people demand as the pattern of our lives, is not, as we have seen, the Jesus of the Gospels. It is indeed a different ideal for every man and woman. But for us Americans, it must be modern and American. Jesus was a Jew, unmarried, the father of no children, apparently somewhat skeptical of the marriage relation,[1] as Paul was. He was not a citizen but only a subject of the empire; he was not a man of affairs; he had nothing to do with art; he was the example of a Hebraic type, in contrast to the generous Greek type of life, or the vigorous Norse type. The dominant thought of the cross and the resurrection puts him somewhat away from the normal healthy-minded youth and man. Our actual ideal, on the contrary, is of a patriot, a husband and father, a man of affairs, a man of the world, in the highest sense of the word, whose business it is, not so much to die bravely as to

[1] Matt. xix. 10–12.

live nobly, while fearless of death. Our ideal embraces both the Hebraic and the Classic type in a larger pattern than either. This is a different ideal from that which the name of Jesus represents. It is absolutely essential to teach this ideal to our generation with freedom and heartiness.

As a matter of fact the world of Christendom has never taken Jesus' life seriously as a possible life to pattern after. The world does not now take it in earnest. "Ah," men say, when Jesus is mentioned, "His life was out of the common. It was supernatural. No one else could do as he did; no one can be like him." The words, the "leadership of Jesus" in certain mottoes doubtless set before most people the figure of a somewhat exalted personage, walking in advance and apart from the rest of the world. Do our Sunday school children think that Jesus ever smiled? He is mostly an unreal man, with an unreal or quite exceptional mission. This is unfortunate for the teaching of the art of the good life as normal and gladsome. People actually come to use the exceptional character of Jesus' life as an excuse

for doing nothing practical with his noblest teachings!

More important yet, as we have already shown, there are very naturally elements in the story of the actual Jesus which appear seriously misleading and even unethical in the light of our best spiritual truth. Men call Jesus' example difficult and "unpractical" on the side of his faith, his sense of duty, his devotion, his non-resistance, but they constantly cite his frequent use of anger and denunciation. We cannot afford any longer to let them quote that unlovely passage about his driving out the money-changers from the temple, whenever justification is wanted for bitter words, for a quarrel or a war. We cannot permit men to use Jesus' mighty example for calling their fellows hypocrites and "a generation of vipers"; we cannot let them quote his authority for buying swords.[2]

Men have indeed often put a high use to the question: "What would Jesus do?" as a mode of guidance in problems of conduct. What

[2] Luke xxii. 36. But compare the fine passage Matt. xxvi 52.

they really mean is what would the most perfect man do? They evidently cannot know what the actual Jesus would have done for example, with the problem of temperance in the United States, or with the backward races, or even with legislation upon the subject of divorce. Each man proposes as Jesus' presumable answer the judgment of his own conscience. The Italian Roman Catholic or German Lutheran sees no moral difficulty in the story that Jesus made wine out of water and prescribed the perpetual use of wine in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Millions of people in America on the other hand see in wine no longer the symbol of pure joy but of degrading temptation. Such considerations suggest the absence of any express or infallible ethical standard to which men may resort as to an oracle and have an answer to their questions free of the costly discipline of thought, experience and sympathy. Is not this because ethical and spiritual development, so far from being based on a set of finite rules, is an endless process of movement toward the conception of an infinite Good Will? The loss of per-

sonal acquaintance with the actual Jesus,—a man who stands in the past,—is in fact the facing about towards the noblest ideal of the living God.

Meanwhile the need and the sense of personal companionship in the good life do not depend at all upon the belief in Jesus as the only perfect man. Who does not have the ideal companionship of actual friends among the living as well as among the departed? In other words, we steady our consciences many a time by asking: What would my father or my mother, my wife or my friend do and say in this emergency? This appeal of the imagination is as effective as it is to ask: What would Jesus do?

It is often said that a religion must be personal. In other words, it must worship a founder: its sentiment must cling around a single object. There is a valid truth here. It is the truth embodied in the faith that God in some sense is a person and not an abstract force. A vital religion conceives of a Life, an Intelligence, a Good Will, with whom we can come into unison, who may reverently be said

to care for or love us, in doing whose will we have peace, satisfaction and gladness. In this high sense, religion must be personal.

Religion is also made manifest through symbols and through persons. But it is not true that it is dependent upon a single symbol or personal manifestation. Vast as the loss would be if we could suppose the history of religion to be blotted out to the beginning of the eighteenth century, we surely could not therefore lose religion. The fact is, there are many symbols and numerous personal manifestations of religion. It has been said that Jesus showed both what God is like and what man may be. We say a larger thing. The present generation has seen thousands of men and women who have shown us what God is like and what man may be. He is indeed poor who has not known some such beautiful life. When therefore Jesus takes his natural place in the marching ranks of mankind we have not lost a single personal element from our religion. We behold a great company of lovable, heroic and admirable lives.

There is one great use of Jesus' life which

will perhaps always remain. In many respects he stands as a familiar and notable type of humanity. The old view of him as the single Savior of the human race passes away as soon as men cease to think of themselves as a doomed, or "lost" race, that is, wherever the modern evolutionary doctrine holds good of a race in process of becoming. But there is a continual need, no longer for a unique Savior, but for innumerable helpers, saviors and lovers of men. Jesus is doubtless the best known name among this great and growing class.

Again, it seems to be a spiritual law that no one can be a helper of his fellows, except through obedience to a deep law of cost. It matters little whether one dies or lives for the sake of his fellows. He must in any case give his life cheerfully in order to lift the level of the common humanity. Jesus' case is the typical instance of this great law of cost and willingness. But we all have to obey it. Every good mother knows it as well as Jesus.

I wish to leave the impression as strong as possible that we have gained and not lost anything, in this view of Jesus. Let me make my

meaning clear by a simple parable. A child was once given a costly gem. It was wrapped in many coverings and hidden away in a dark closet so that he rarely could see it. He fondly supposed that it was the only gem in the world. At last a whole handful of beautiful jewels were set before him. Is he poorer or richer than before? Is he poorer because he now knows more than ever about gems? He does not even care in his joy at the variety of beauty before him, which gem is the largest or the most near mathematical perfectness in his collection.

It remains to treat Jesus naturally, as we treat all the benefactors of our race. With all modesty, we do not range ourselves exclusively as the disciples of any single great man, not of Socrates or Plato in philosophy, not of Homer or Dante in poetry, not of Michael Angelo or Praxiteles in art, not of Beethoven or Wagner in music, not of Newton or Bacon or Darwin in science. We use and enjoy and admire them all. We make all of them serve as object lessons, each in his own way. Our wealth of human interest and sympathy thus grows

larger. Marching in one grand procession, they all and each of them stir us to practical effort and valid hope, better than a single unique, lonely, and unattainable Master, if such there were, could ever stir us. There is a new sense of a grand companionship to which we all belong.

This natural view of Jesus is in line, as the exclusive and exaggerated view of him is not in line, with the whole trend of the democratic thought of our age. To most men even yet Jesus is the center and head of a monarchical scheme of religion. It is easy to bow in church and make a king of one who lived and died twenty centuries ago. Such homage costs little reflection and no effort of substantial good will. The democratic ideal, on the other hand, conceives of a host of men, all of one common nature, all associated together as members of one family, all needing both to help and to be helped, to give and to take of each other, to teach and to be taught, to inspire and to be inspired by every fresh act and word of friendliness and devotion. There is here no one Master or Leader or Savior—like a king-cell

in the human body. There is reciprocity; there is mutuality. If one has it in him to show the structure and the gleam of the diamond, all men also may show the same glint, and enter into the same beautiful structure. This alone is spiritual democracy.

The only objection to this view of Jesus' relative place in the world of men comes from the side of the temporary hurt to our sentiment. The same sentimental opposition was once raised to a democratic government, free of any sole figure of a king to revere, and about whom to rally the nation. It has been found that the sentiment of loyalty may be more mighty and effective, as well as far more sane, among the citizens of a republic than among the subjects of an empire. It has been found that men are abundantly willing to die for the sentiment of a rational citizenship in a great republic. Be sure that no sentiment which is good for anything can be permanently harmed by facing the light of day.

This view of Jesus' relation to human nature is absolutely called for by the practical purposes of ethical education. You cannot

easily make the life of Jesus interesting and persuasive to the ordinary boy or youth. There is too little usable incident. Throwing out the wonder-stories, there is a fatal lack of material to make into continuous lessons sufficient for several years of Bible study. Barring exceptions and the work of teachers of marked genius, the child's mind becomes weary of the study of Jesus. The scenery is foreign to him, and the moral and spiritual experiences are remote. How many Sunday school teachers have ever had such an acquaintance with Jesus' life in any of its phases as to be able to make young people acquainted with it?

Take your freedom now! Use Jesus just as you would use any other grand figure of the distant past, precisely as it happens to impress you. Use it much or little, for your own help or for the training of youth, just so far as it commends itself to you as usable. Then add to it, in democratic and natural fashion, all the treasures of biographical material with which our world is growing rich. Add the lives of men and women who have impressed themselves upon our own generation, and have

helped to make human history nobler. Tell as many stories from every source as you can, all going to show the glory, the success, the happiness, the health of the good life. Has not the impulse come to you toward this life, almost as if from the atmosphere you breathe? It is doubtless the atmosphere of goodwill. See to it that this atmosphere is around your youth in the home, as well as in the church, or Sunday-school room.

Be sure that there is that in human life which is greater than the greatest man. It is the spirit of man, or rather the spirit of God. Wherever the good spirit is there is God. Wherever this spirit is in history, history ceases to be profane and becomes sacred. Wherever this spirit possesses men there is not one son of God, but all are God's children. Nothing less than this is the gospel for to-day.

670009 A

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